

Dogs Should Live Forever

Category: Gratitude

written by Sara Ann Conkling | November 28, 2021

I wasn't looking for a new dog. I had recently lost my best friend of over sixteen years, a beloved terrier mix. My sister had dragged me into the shelter so that she could get a new cat. So, while she looked at cats, I decided to pet all the dogs, lingering a little longer with the ones that looked the most sad.

The shelter staff began to follow me like I was a shoplifter. "Can we help you find a dog?" "What kind of dog would you like?" "Would you like to meet that dog?" Desperation tinged their inquiries. I tried not to be annoyed, realizing that they were just doing their jobs in a kill shelter. Finally, I spoke: "Look, I just lost my dog, and I'm not ready for another dog. But, if I were going to take a dog, I would take the dog that no one wants, who is going to be euthanized today."

That "but" sealed my fate. "Have we got a dog for you!" one of the staff exclaimed, disappearing into doggy death row. When he came out, a huge, elderly, despondent hound mix was on the other end of the leash.

Toby wouldn't even look at me. He had come into the shelter as an abuse case. He knew he was going to die. "I'll take him," I said, surprising even myself.

Up to that moment, I had never been owned by a big dog. Nor a dog who was clearly unsuited to being walked on a leash. Nor, any creature as stubborn as Toby. But, as time wore on, he has proved to be loyal, kind and patient. He loves rolling in the grass and riding in the car. He is a perfect gentleman for visitors. He sleeps beside me every night.

Recently, Toby began to slow down. Ultimately our vet delivered the very bad news that he has cancer. At age 14 and a half—almost five years after I adopted him—he is approaching the rainbow bridge.

So, now I hide medicine in his home-cooked food and give him big beef bones I buy from our local grocery. We take shorter walks. The neighborhood kids keep coming over to pet him. I keep hoping a squirrel will offer him one more thrill of a chase.

And, every night, I tell him I love him, and I thank him for being my dog.

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